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1964/08/04

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AUGUST 4, 1964
9:15 ~~p~~ p.m.

TELEPHONE NOTES
THE PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY McNAMARA (f)
(A) (B)

A Hello.

B Bob McNamara, Mr. President.

A Yeah..

B I just talked to Admiral Sharp again..he's in contact with the carriers..they have not been able to launch yet..they won't launch for another..about 45 minutes. They should launch at 10:00 pm. I have this suggestion to make..to you. That you make your statement at approximately 10:00 pm. And that you leave out one sentence. It is the sentence that states: "air action is now in execution against gunboats and supporting facility in and near ....ports as near as North VietNam... " Without that sentence..you don't disclose the target..but you do disclose that action is presently under way.

A Yeah...let me see..where is that...

B It is in the fourth paragraph on the first page... "...that reply is now being given to you. " then take out the next sentence.

A Well..that..does that make it too indefinite.

B No sir, I don't believe so...I think it is perfectly appropriate while the action is under way..you've not described the specific targets or the type of action.

A What do you think about it..I don't see why we don't bring Goldwater in on this..why don't we just say..I thought it appropriate it just to communicate my statement and decision to the Republican candidate. Not say..he's assured me of his full support. I think it makes us sound like we're very much together..buddies and agreeing on bombing everybody.

B Well..in that case..I'd leave out the paragraph. I wouldn't say I'd communicated it.

A What do you think?

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B I would... well have you been able to talk to him?

A No.. not yet.

B Well I'd leave the paragraph out.
You've talked up above about the leaders of both parties and it seems to me that is the strong point..

A Yeah.. trouble is he's going to be calling in about 9:30...

B Well I~~d~~ 'd keep talking to him... trying to talk to him all right ... but I don't think I'd ~~fe~~ refer to it as...

A What would you do.. wait till after... talk to him until after.. he's out on a boat.. they've gone to get him... or would you talk to him as soon as he gets in and tell him I'm going to make a statement .. wanted him to know about it.. and then not refer to it..

B That's exactly what I'd do Mr. President.
I'd try to talk to him before I made it but I wouldn't refer to my talking to him after I made it. And the purpose of talking to him would be to stop any opposition from him.. and if you did that I think you've accomplished a purpose... you don't have to tie him into your statement.

A I think we'd better do that.. don't you?

B Yes.

A What is delaying it so...

B Just the limitations of time Mr. President... we're asking an awful lot of them... they said intitially they could do it but it is proven now that they couldn't... had to brief the crews and load the aircraft with specific type of weapons for these particular targets.. and it took more time than they anticipated.

A Now when they leave the carrier at 10:00 how long does it take them to get over to the target?

B The last time over the target will be two hours... from that we believe. Which would be about 12:00 oclock our time...

A. Well do we want to give them 2 hours notice?

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_ don't believe there's any reason Not to Mr. President. I don't think there is any serious problem..

A Better check that Bob.

B I did. I just talked to Admiral Sharp about it. He did not want this particular sentence.. the one I'm suggesting you take out.. prior to the time they get over the target.

A Well won't they get this simoultaneously almost?

B They'll get the statement simultaneously but they won't know what targets are being used...

A Looks like they'd think that we'll hit .. wherever those boats are coming from... and looks like we might get out there with some antiaircraft... I'd sure as hell hate to have some say.. you announced it.. my boy got killed.

B I don't think there is much danger of that Mr. President.. how late would you be willing to hold the statement?

A I just.. guess we could hold it until the 11:00 oclock news... I don't know.. we don't have to make it do we?

B Oh I think you have to make some kind of statement, Mr. President. Because tomorrow morning will be too late... something will have to be in the news tomorrow morning and it ought to come from you.

A Well lets see how it goes along.. he's told you though he's going to launch them at 10:00?

B That's right..

A And it takes them two hours to get over the target?

B Well the launch will take place over a period of time and the last aircraft launched is estimated to be over the target at ... 2 hours after launch..

A What do you think the first will be?

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B First one ought to be over the target within an hour after launch but the radar of the North Vietnamese should pick up the first aircraft a few minutes after launching... say 10:30 our time... the NorthVietnamese would be aware of attacking airfraft coming in...

A So that'd be all right then.

B I would think so.. if you did it at 10:30... I'd think you could make the 11:00 oclock news.

A Okay. Thank you.

B Yes sir.

yb

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PRESIDENT JOHNSON'S NOTES ON CONVERSATION WITH SECRETARY MC NAMARA, AUGUST 4, 1964 4706 b.

In connection with a statement with reference to the Gulf of Tonkin incident, Secretary McNamara reported that he had just talked with Admiral Sharp again and that he had been in contact with the carriers; that they had not been able to launch yet--that they would not launch for another 45 minutes. He said they could possibly launch at 10:00 p.m. and McNamara suggested that the President make his statement at 10:00 p.m. He suggested that the President leave out one sentence in his statement. He said without that sentence he did not disclose the target but that he did disclose that action is presently under way.

The President asked if that made it too indefinite and McNamara said he did not think so; that he thought it was perfectly appropriate while the action is under way. He said he had not described the specific targets or the type of action in his statement.

The President said he did not see why he did not bring Goldwater in on this. He suggested that he tell Goldwater: "I thought it appropriate just to communicate my statement and decision to the Republican candidate--not say he's assured me of his full support. I think it makes us sound like we're very much together.. buddies and agreeing on bombing everybody."

Secretary McNamara said in that case he would leave out the paragraph--would not say "I'd communicate it."

The President asked Secretary McNamara if he would continue to try to reach Goldwater--that he had been unable to do so. He said he would keep on trying, but that he would leave the paragraph previously referred to out--said the President had talked already about the leaders of both parties and it seemed to him that that is the strong point.

The President said he would tell him that he was going to make a statement and wanted him to know about it--then not refer to it. McNamara thought that was the right approach. He said:

"I'd try to talk to him before I made it, but I wouldn't refer to my talking to him after I made it. And the purpose of talking to him would be to stop any opposition from him, and if you did that I think you've accomplished a purpose--you don't have to tie him into your statement.

They then discussed the timing of the attack.

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The President told McNamara to check the statement and he said that he had talked with Admiral Sharp about it and that the Admiral did not want the particular sentence that McNamara objected to included in the statement.

The President said:

"Looks like they'd think that we'll hit wherever those boats are coming from and looks like we might get out there with some antiaircraft. I'd sure as hell hate to have some say--you announced it and my boy got killed."

Secretary McNamara did not believe there was much danger in that but felt that the President had to make some kind of statement because something would have to be in the news the next morning and he felt that it was best to come from the President.

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